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# THE REST CURE

A Play in One Act

by

GERTRUDE E. JENNINGS

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by

GERTRUDE E. JENNINGS

SAMUEL FRENCH LIMITED  
LONDON

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## THE REST CURE

Produced on March 16, 1914, under the management of Norman McKinell and Frederic Whelen at the Vaudeville Theatre, London, with the following cast of characters:—

CLARENCE REED . . . . . *Mr. Otho Stuart.*

OLIVE (his Wife) . . . . . *Miss Doris Norman Trevor.*

ALICE PALMER (Dark Cat)	{ (Nurses at the Home) . . .	{ <i>Miss Dora Gregory.</i> <i>Miss Mary Clare.</i>
MAY WILLIAMS (Fair Cat)		

MURIEL (Servant at the Home) . *Miss Phyllis Stuckey.*

SCENE.—A Bedroom in a Nursing Home.

## PROPERTIES

A carpet sweeper or broom.  
Toilet cover.  
A pile of clothing (man's).  
Pair of boots.  
Pair of trousers.  
Dressing-gown.  
Walking-stick.  
Small book.  
Jug of water.  
Thimble.  
Scuttle of coal.  
Portmanteau.  
Sponge-bag.  
Brush and comb.  
Photograph.  
Hand-bell.  
Tray.  
Plate of mutton and a potato.  
Plate of suet pudding.  
Knife, fork, spoon.  
Bread.  
Glass of water.  
Two dish-covers.  
Table napkin.  
Book.

## THE REST CURE

*The SCENE is a small bedroom. There is a door L.C., fireplace L., a window R., a small chest of drawers near door, a small table near bed, washhand-stand R. of door. The bed is down stage R.C. near the window. In the window is a toilet table with looking-glass. There are two bedroom chairs in the room. The floor is covered with oil-cloth: there are two small rugs. On the window-sill there is a parrot in a cage.*

*When CURTAIN rises, MURIEL, the servant, is discovered sweeping. MURIEL is a round-faced, healthy-looking, cheerful girl with fuzzy light hair. She picks a hairpin up and puts it in her hair.*

*ALICE PALMER enters C. She is pale and dismal, but rather a pretty girl, with dark hair. Her voice is sharp and snappy. She crosses room to toilet table and puts on a toilet cover.*

ALICE. Are you nearly done, Muriel? The patient will be up in a minute.

MURIEL. Yes, nurse. I put a match to the fire, but it ain't drorin'.

ALICE. I hope the horrid thing isn't going to smoke.

MURIEL. I 'ope not too, nurse, but a more contrivin' chimbley than this one I never come acrost.

ALICE. You'd better do the grate in No. 5 now.

(MURIEL goes to door.)

MURIEL. Yes, nurse. (Turns at door.) That there gent in No. 5 hollers at me somethin' awful. He says if I come into the room again he'll wring my neck.

ALICE. I can't help *his* troubles. The grate must be done.

MURIEL. Yes, nurse. (*Exits. Meets MAY outside.*)

MAY (*off stage*). What are you doing in there, Muriel?

MURIEL. Getting the room ready, nurse.

MAY (*off*). Oh, bother, is anyone coming in to-day?

MURIEL. I don't know, nurse.

ALICE. May! (*calling.*)

(MAY enters. *She is a very pretty, fair-haired young woman, with a bright, vivacious manner.*)

MAY. Oh! You're here. Who's coming? I never hear a word. I do think Matron might let me know.

ALICE. It isn't a new patient exactly. It's that tiresome little toad from No. 5.

MAY (*sitting on the edge of bed*). The one that came in last night?

ALICE. Yes. He's a terror. What do you s'pose he's complained of?

MAY. Don't know.

ALICE. The *noise*, my dear. Says the traffic in the King's Road disturbed him. Says he was awake all night with it. I couldn't quiet him, no matter what I did, and Matron says you're to have a try.

MAY. What's he in for?

ALICE. A rest cure. He writes books.

MAY (*disappointed*). Oh! An author!

ALICE. Yes. Needn't say any more, *need* I? He's been kicking up such a shine about the motors. Complained to Matron, if you please! (MAY *tosses her head.*) I suppose he thinks the traffic ought to be turned off the King's Road for him. (ALICE *goes to bed.*) Are these clean sheets?

MAY (*doubtfully*). Oh, well—yes. Turn them head to foot if you like.

(*She goes L. of bed, and together they turn down the bed-clothes.*)

ALICE. I think they're good enough for him.



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CLARENCE. Is *this* the room?

MAY. What does he write—novels? I wish it was Charles Garvice or Nat Gould.

ALICE. No such luck. He writes *vers libre*.

MAY. What's that?

ALICE. Something improper, by the sound of it.

CLARENCE (*heard off stage*). Gently, dear, gently.

ALICE. Here he comes.

(MAY goes out of the door to look, returning with each sentence into the room.)

MAY. He's not so bad looking. (*With interest*.) I rather like his face. Oh, I think he's quite nice. (*Annoyed*.) Who's the female?

ALICE. That's his wife.

MAY (*very disappointed*). Oh! Married! (*Goes to fireplace*.)

ALICE. Yes, dear. No chance for you!

MAY (*pettishly*). Don't be silly. You know I don't mean that.

CLARENCE (*off*). Higher, is it? Oh, dear!

MAY (*sulkily*). I suppose I *must* take him.

ALICE. Of course you must. Buck up! (*Pokes MAY, who screams*. ALICE goes out, stands in doorway.) This is the room, Mrs. Reed. Yes, in here.

(Enter CLARENCE REED. He is dressed in pyjamas and a dressing-gown and sleeping socks, with bedroom slippers. He is supported by his wife, a pretty, fragile, rather depressed-looking woman of twenty-eight. She is R. of CLARENCE.)

CLARENCE (C., *discontentedly*). Is *this* the room?

ALICE. Yes.

CLARENCE. It's very small, isn't it?

ALICE. Oh, no, Mr. Reed! It's not quite as large as the one you had last night, but it's one of our very best rooms.

CLARENCE. Really?

ALICE. Oh, yes.

OLIVE. I'm sure you'll like this, Clarence, it's very bright.

CLARENCE. Where does that window look out on to ?

ALICE. That's a mews. So you see you'll be quite quiet.

OLIVE (*crossing to ALICE, R.C.*). A mews ? But is that healthy ?

ALICE. We've never had any complaints.

(*OLIVE goes on to window and looks out.*)

CLARENCE. Curious. Is it a feather mattress ?

ALICE. Oh, no. We haven't any.

CLARENCE. I had one last night.

ALICE. The only one in the house.

CLARENCE. Does the bed squeak ?

ALICE. Squeak ?

CLARENCE. The one downstairs squeaks disgracefully. When I didn't jump at the sound of motor buses, I flinched at the squeaking of the bed.

MAY. How very strange ! Our beds have always been considered quite noiseless.

ALICE. Oh—this is your nurse now, Nurse Williams.

(*MAY grins at him.*)

CLARENCE. How do you do ? I'm sorry to seem fussy. But really, I've had a most awful night. The motor buses were too dreadful. It seems so strange to have a nursing home in one of the noisiest streets in London. I feel quite a nervous wreck this morning.

MAY. Perhaps you had better get to bed.

OLIVE. Yes, dear, do. (*Crossing back to him.*)

MAY. I think you have been having too much excitement. It makes one fanciful, doesn't it ? Seeing so many people, too, is upsetting. (*She is outwardly sympathetic, but there is an "edge" on her voice.*)

OLIVE. I had better be going. (*Moves to door.*)

CLARENCE (*terrified, stops her*). No, no, Olive, don't go yet. I've got ever so much to say to you.

MAY (*firmly*). Well, five minutes, Mr. Reed, no more. After that, no visitors, no books, no papers, for a month. You know the rule.

CLARENCE. Ah, but that's just what I need ! A

thorough rest. (*Looks at OLIVE.*) I'm completely run down. (*Looks at MAY.*) My nerves are in a terrible state. (*Looks at DARK CAT.*) (*They all turn away.*) I——

MAY. Well, I'll look in in five minutes, and then—no more talking! (*Exit, followed by ALICE.*)

CLARENCE (*getting into bed*). Good-looking girl, the fair one, but very firm. However, that's what I need. I do hope this bed doesn't squeak! (*Bounces to try it.*) No, not in the same way. I'm always inclined to do too much. And you never stopped me, Olive.

OLIVE. I did my best. (*Arranges his pillow, then crosses to chest of drawers, and opens a drawer to see if it is clean.*)

CLARENCE. Ah, but you've no authority, dear. I don't *blame* you, but of course, with a nervous highly-strung man like myself, firmness is necessary. Otherwise I go beyond my strength. And it isn't right. My work ought to be done.

(*OLIVE crosses to toilet table.*)

Who will write my books after I am gone? I have asked you that so often. And you never know *what* to say. Very well, then.

(*The parrot whistles, a sharp, discordant double note.*)

CLARENCE. What on earth is that noise?

OLIVE (*sits on bed by CLARENCE*). I suppose they will bring up your clothes and all your things. I should like to have seen you quite settled in before I left you.

CLARENCE. Now why worry about my clothes? I shan't want them again for a month. Such a blessing! You always make a fuss about trifles.

(*Door opens noisily and MURIEL staggers in with a large pile of mixed clothing, walking-stick and sponges, etc.*)

MURIEL. Beg pardon, sir, your things.

CLARENCE. Yes, yes. Put them down anywhere.

MURIEL. Yes, sir. (*Drops them down in a heap on floor at foot of bed.*)

OLIVE (*rises*). I'll put them away.

MURIEL. All right, mum. (*Exits.*)

(OLIVE *picks up a tie and puts it in toilet-table drawer.*)

CLARENCE. Now, Olive, do sit down. I've only got two or three minutes with you, and I want to have a few last words of the greatest importance. Don't fidget about. You know how it worries me.

OLIVE. Very well, dear. (*Sits R. of him, drawing chair forward.*)

CLARENCE. Now, please, listen *very* carefully. I want to read you a few extracts out of this most valuable little book. (*Bringing a small book out of his pyjama pocket.*)

OLIVE (*surprised*). A book?

CLARENCE. Yes. I found it in the waiting-room.

(*The parrot repeats his whistle.*)

What is that peculiar whistling?

OLIVE. But, Clarence dear, you know you aren't allowed any books.

CLARENCE. No! But I knew I should want to read myself to sleep last night, so I secreted this. I was rather upset when I saw the title, *The Nurses' Pocket Book*! But it turned out most interesting.

OLIVE. I don't see how it *could* have.

CLARENCE. Olive, if you'd only study this book, you'd make quite a capable nurse. And when I come back home you'd be able to look after me properly.

OLIVE (*rising*). But, Clarence, I hope you're coming home quite well!

CLARENCE. Perhaps I shall. Who knows!

OLIVE. I think you'd better, Clarence dear, because otherwise there may not be a home to come to.

CLARENCE. What do you mean?

OLIVE. Oh, nothing.

(*The parrot whistles.*)

CLARENCE. I wish somebody would stop that noise! It's getting on my nerves. Now, I'll just read you a

few simple rules on nursing. Here's the page. "Always give the patient nourishing and tempting food." Now you know, Olive——

OLIVE. Please don't say I didn't give you enough to eat!

CLARENCE. Not always tempting. Once you offered me boiled mutton.

OLIVE. That was five years ago.

CLARENCE. Never mind. The fact that I remember it shows.

*(Door bursts open ; MURIEL enters with a jug.)*

MURIEL. 'Scuse me, won't you? It's the water. *(Goes to washstand and pours water noisily into jug.)*

CLARENCE. Trying, rather, don't you think?

OLIVE. Very.

MURIEL. That's all right. *(Exits.)*

CLARENCE. Well! To go on. "Never stand talking in a patient's room to a third person." *Excellent*, that is. "If putting coal on the fire, wrap each lump in a piece of newspaper, and place it lightly on the fire." You never did that. Oh, that ugly jarring noise of coal! "Do not bang the door." "Do not talk about anything gloomy or depressing." And you *would* remind me about the water rate!

OLIVE. It had to be paid.

CLARENCE. I see no reason. I must say, though, that the nurse I had last evening—you know, the dark one—wasn't very cheerful. She *would* talk about operations. And they all ended fatally. Well—— *(He takes up the book to resume. MAY enters.)*

MAY *(firmly)*. Time is up, Mrs. Reed. Very sorry, but I must ask you to go now.

OLIVE *(rising)*. Certainly. *(She crosses behind bed.)*

CLARENCE. Oh, but I hadn't half finished!

MAY *(same manner)*. Such a pity, but Matron's rules, you know.

OLIVE *(L. of him)*. Good-bye, dear boy. Try and get well and strong again, won't you. I shall call and ask after you every day, and send you flowers.

CLARENCE. Good-bye, Olive. Take care of my books, and don't let Gyp tear the curtains.

OLIVE. No, dear. (*Kisses him.*) Good-bye. (*Goes to door. To MAY.*) Good morning.

MAY. Good morning. (*OLIVE exits. MAY shuts the door and comes C.*)

CLARENCE. Gyp is her dog.

MAY. Oh, yes? (*She looks disdainfully at the heap of clothes.*)

CLARENCE. He's a nuisance in the house. I'm a mere bundle of nervous tissue, and I can't bear any noise.

MAY. I had an uncle like that. With him it was drink.

CLARENCE. Really!

MAY (*she rattles out all following, hardly giving CLARENCE time to reply*). Yes. Never saw a man drink like that. He died of it. It was when we were living at Sydenham. Father was alive then. I'm the youngest of ten. Too many, wasn't it? All girls, and all pretty, but me. I was considered the plain one of the family. (*Looks at him coquettishly.*)

CLARENCE. Indeed? I——

MAY. All my sisters earn their own living. One's a teacher, one lectures, three of them are married. We did have a nice house at Sydenham before father died. We had three sitting-rooms and a conservatory. It was a nice house. And we knew all the best people.

CLARENCE (*bored*). Oh, really!

MAY. We entertained such a lot. And there were dances once a month. We all used to go. I met *such* a nice man at one of the dances. It was Coronation year, and Judith was going to be married. Her fiancé was in a Government office, and he said——

(*The parrot whistles his tune.*)

CLARENCE (*frantic*). There's that terrible boy again!

MAY (*coldly*). What boy?

CLARENCE. That whistling! It's too awful. Couldn't you speak to him?

MAY (*crossing to window and looking out*). That? Oh, that's my parrot. He's on the window-sill.

CLARENCE. Your parrot!

MAY. Yes. I keep it here because it's the sunniest room. One can't be too kind to dumb animals. (*Arranges his pillows.*)

CLARENCE. But they're so very seldom really dumb. Now, don't you think this parrot——

(*Enter MURIEL, out of breath and upset.*)

MURIEL. Please, nurse, Matron says you never give Mrs. Barclay her sleeping draff, and she's gone off to sleep without it.

MAY. Can't Nurse Palmer give it?

MURIEL. Please, nurse, she says it's not her business.

MAY (*annoyed*). All right. I'll come. (*MURIEL exits. MAY crosses to door, turns.*) But that woman's an awful bother to wake up once she's gone off to sleep.

(*MAY exits. She leaves the door open.*)

CLARENCE. Nurse, nurse!

MAY (*returning*). Yes?

CLARENCE. Please shut the door. There's such a draught.

MAY (*annoyed*). Certainly. (*Exits, banging door, which makes CLARENCE scream. She returns.*)

MAY (*icily*). Did you call again?

CLARENCE (*frightened*). No!

MAY. Oh!

(*Exits, banging door again. CLARENCE shudders, then decides to sleep a little. He draws the sheet up to him.*)

ALICE enters noisily. CLARENCE starts up.)

ALICE (*shutting door*). Only me. I think I must have left my thimble in here day before yesterday. You don't mind if I look? (*Goes to mantelpiece and shakes all the vases.*)

CLARENCE. Not at all.

ALICE (*opening and shutting all the drawers in chest of drawers*). I used to bring my sewing here because

the patient was lonely. Funny thing, you know, he came in for a rest cure.

CLARENCE. Did he? Was he an author?

ALICE. Oh, no, he was a gentleman. But the queer part of it was that *he* thought he was run down, and really he was dangerously ill. (*Bangs a drawer to.*)

CLARENCE. Really! I always say that my wife may be quite wrong about me. I don't think I would have such curious pains——

ALICE (*going to L. of bed and kneeling*). He was a very nice gentleman. Came in here for a month. (*Pokes under bed with CLARENCE'S stick.*)

(CLARENCE, *much agitated, looks down R. of bed and sees stick waving about. ALICE rises.*)

CLARENCE. And how long did he stay?

ALICE (C.). Well, he never *went, really*, as you might say——

CLARENCE. What! He——?

ALICE (*nods*). Yes, night before last. This has never been a lucky room. (*Feeling about bed for thimble.*) Funny, where can I have put that thimble? (*Crosses to dressing-table.*) I must hurry up. I've got such a very bad case upstairs. Delirious. (*Turns to CLARENCE.*) He gets quite violent sometimes, and roams about the house. So awkward!

CLARENCE. Roams about the house!

ALICE. Yes. Oh, here it is! (*Picks thimble up and knocks over the table.*)

CLARENCE. Oh!

ALICE. So sorry! That's the worst of these tables, they *do* upset so easily. (*She replaces it, also bell and book, then crosses behind bed to R.C.*)

CLARENCE. I was thinking I should like to sleep a little.

ALICE. Sleep? Your dinner'll be in soon! (*Feeling in her apron.*) You haven't come across a needle anywhere in the bed, have you?

CLARENCE (*alarmed*). No!

ALICE. Oh, never mind, it'll turn up.

MAY (*outside*). Nurse Palmer!

ALICE. Yes?

MAY. Where are you?

ALICE. No. 10.

(MAY enters; comes forward L. of ALICE.)

MAY. Oh, my dear, such a joke!

ALICE. What's happened?

MAY. Why, you know that girl in No. 11 who was supposed to have nettle-rash?

ALICE. Yes?

MAY. Well, it turns out she's got scarlet fever!

CLARENCE. What!

ALICE. Never!

MAY. Yes! And Dr. Preston's so cross because *he* said nettle-rash. And of course, she oughtn't to be here at all! (*They both laugh.*) They'll have to get her away somehow. I had to come out of the room, I laughed so much.

CLARENCE. But surely, nurse, it isn't very safe! You have obviously come right out of the infected room in here! I surely ought to have another nurse!

MAY (*casually*). Oh, no, you're all right.

ALICE. Just you have a little nap, Mr. Reed.

CLARENCE. Yes, but I don't think——

MAY. Dr. Preston did turn a colour, and Matron looked right down her nose and sniffed, *you* know.

ALICE. Rather! I know Matron's sniff!

(*They both laugh, ALICE sits on bed.*)

CLARENCE (*in an agony*). Would you mind? (*ALICE springs up.*) I really feel very ill. I *should* like a little sleep.

MAY. Yes. It'll do you good. Come along, nurse, and see the end of it. (*They move towards door, arm in arm.*) Oh, your fire wants seeing to. I'll send Muriel.

CLARENCE. Who's Muriel? Couldn't you do it yourself?

MAY (*turns at door*). *Hardly* part of our work, is

it? Now, don't you worry. (*Returns to him and settles the bed-clothes.*) Lie down and keep quite quiet. Then you'll soon get well. (*She goes to door.*)

ALICE (*in an undertone, but quite audibly*). There's something more the matter with that man than nerves. If ever I saw death in a face——

(*They exit, banging door. CLARENCE jumps out of bed and goes to the glass, looks at his face earnestly in different lights. At last comes to c. of stage.*)

CLARENCE. Cheerful! I must say! (*Goes back to bed, sits on the side of it.*) They haven't even read the *Nurses' Pocket Book*! (*Knock on door.*) Come in!

(*Enter MURIEL with large scuttle of coal.*)

MURIEL. It's the coal, sir.

CLARENCE. So I see.

MURIEL. Am I to put it on, sir?

CLARENCE. Yes, yes.

MURIEL. Thank you, sir. (*Comes c.*)

CLARENCE. You know how to do it?

MURIEL. Oh, lor'! Yes.

CLARENCE. She *has* read the *Nurses' Pocket Book*! Are you going to be a nurse some day?

(*MURIEL deliberately turns up her sleeves.*)

MURIEL. Oh, no, sir. Nurse Palmer says I haven't got the brains. I'm going to be an author.

CLARENCE. Oh, are you! My poor girl!

MURIEL. Yes, sir. I'm going to write stories. And as soon as I can buy a typewriter I shall print 'em. You see, I can't git the better of the spellin', sir, so I 'as to wait for a typewriter to do it for me.

CLARENCE. I suppose your stories will all be about dukes and duchesses, and beautiful ladies?

MURIEL. No, sir. They're going to be about myself and the queer things I seen at nursing 'omes, and the folks we 'as 'ere as thinks themselves ill. I goes about and sees it, and says to meself, What mugs! And then I sets it down in my book.

CLARENCE. But people are really ill sometimes, you know.

MURIEL. They don't make 'arf the fuss then, sir. When they've come to lay me down and die they're as noice again. It's the 'ealthy ones that 'ollers. Why, the way I've 'eard people carry on when they didn't like their dinner. They'll holler 'arf acrost the 'ouse! And then these 'ere cases as eats up pounds of butcher's meat and has to be rubbed after it. I 'aven't 'arf got some notes down about 'em. Wot mugs! that's wot I say! (*With this she pours the coal on the fire with a deafening crash. CLARENCE gives a prolonged scream.*)

MURIEL (*runs c.*). Wot's the matter? You ain't never frightened! Why, it was only me putting coal on the fire. Wot d'yer think it was?

CLARENCE (*weakly*). I thought it might be that.

MURIEL. Then why were you a-hollering?

CLARENCE. Have you ever read the *Nurses' Pocket Book*?

MURIEL. Wot? That muck? Not me. It's a fair 'umbug, that book is.

MAY (*off stage*). Muriel!

MURIEL. Yes, nurse, I'm comin'. (*Picks up scuttle.*) That's to No. 5. Just in. (*Goes to door.*) P'raps I shall 'ear something I can set down in my book.

CLARENCE. I say?

MURIEL. Um?

CLARENCE. Don't you ever set down the nurses in your book?

(MURIEL turns at door, and winks.)

MURIEL. Not 'arf! (*Exits.*)

(CLARENCE laughs, settles into bed.)

CLARENCE. Ah, well! (*Dozes.*)

(*A voice of a street singer outside is heard singing "Oh Killarney" in a raucous voice. At end of second line a coin is heard to drop and the voice ceases. CLARENCE shows relief, but in a moment the song continues. At*

*end of first four lines CLARENCE groans, and covers his head in the clothes. At end of second he sits up exasperated, and then rings bell violently. No one comes, but the song continues. He rings again. A pause. Enter MAY.)*

MAY (*coldly*). Are you ringing?

CLARENCE. Yes, nurse. Would you be kind enough to tell that woman to go away?

MAY. What woman?

CLARENCE. That woman screaming in the street.

MAY (*with kind firmness*). Come, come now, you mustn't be fanciful. That's only some one singing. You won't get better unless you keep perfectly quiet. Do remember that.

CLARENCE. How can I keep perfectly quiet in the midst of such a hullabaloo?

MAY. Now, really, Mr. Reed, you do exaggerate, don't you? You remind me rather of my sister Rhoda. She's the typist, you know. She'd swear black's white, I assure you. (*Song stops.*) Gets her into *such* difficulties. We all went to a *matinée* once at the Lyceum, I remember, and——

CLARENCE. Yes, I'm sure it was very awkward. That woman seems to have gone away now.

MAY (*crosses behind bed and looking out of the window*). Yes. She's moved on. There's another nursing home a little higher up, where they take mental cases. She generally makes something there. (*A bang on the door.*) Come in! (*Gruff voice heard off.*)

CLARENCE (*frightened*). I hope this is not the roaming man.

(*A man enters, carrying a portmanteau, which he throws on the floor and exits.*)

MAY (*crosses L.C.*). Oh, your portmanteau! What a bother, isn't it? Are you good at unpacking?

CLARENCE. Not at all!

MAY. Then I'd better get Muriel! It's hardly my work, is it? (*Goes to door.*) Muriel! I expect she's about somewhere. I'll send her in.

(Enter MURIEL.)

MURIEL. Was you callin' me ?

MAY. Yes. Unpack this bag. Put away all these things, and then come to me in No. 5.

MURIEL. Yes, nurse.

(MAY exits.)

(MURIEL goes to portmanteau darkly.) You've got 'er, 'ave you ?

CLARENCE. Yes. Why ? Is she——

MURIEL (*getting clothes off floor*). Well ! I dunno that she's worse than the others. They're all cats 'ere. I calls 'em Dark Cat, Fair Cat, and Sandy Cat. She's Fair Cat. I think p'raps she is a bit worse. (*Crosses to chest of drawers, puts clothes in.*) You see, it's like this. She's a take in. Merry and bright, and all that, and all of a suddint when you ain't lookin' she'll give you one in the eye.

CLARENCE. Oh, will she. (*Is terrified.*)

MURIEL (*returns for more clothes*). She's all right with some people, but you seem to have rubbed 'er up the wrong way.

CLARENCE. I'm sure I don't know how. I've been most considerate, I'm sure, and I hope courteous.

MURIEL. My eye ! I 'ope so, too, for your sake. (*Back to chest of drawers.*) She's 'unted two or three to the brink of their grave, as you may say. Dark Cat can learn 'em the creeps, too. Course I never give 'em away to Matron.

CLARENCE. But why not, my good girl, why not ? It seems to me it's your *duty* to speak, your most obvious duty.

MURIEL (*gets collars, ties, etc., and puts them in drawer*). Well, you see, sir, I ain't rich enough for dooties of that sort. When I'm an author I'll tackle Fair Cat and all of 'em. Course, if anyone was reely ill, I might be a 'ero. And then agin I might not.

CLARENCE. What do you mean by really ill ? Every one who comes is surely *ill*. They don't come here for pleasure.

MURIEL (*takes sponge-bag to washstand.*) Lor' bless you! yes. Why, all of these 'ere rest cures are 'umbugs. Why don't they rest at 'ome? That's wot I says. Generally speaking, their relations pays to get rid of 'em for a month, you take it from me. (*Crosses behind bed.*)

CLARENCE. You don't quite understand. A nervous temperament——

MURIEL (*by toilet table*). I know that nervous temperance, and wot I say is give me liquor. You know where you are wiv liquor, but when it comes to nervous temperance!——

CLARENCE. Come here, girl! Look at me! (*She drops brush.*) You can see I'm really ill, can't you? Do you know what's the matter with me?

MURIEL. I never arsk that, sir. It's lookin' for trouble, that is. If I once started talkin' to patients about their insides, I'd never get my work done. (*Puts brush on table.*) But as it 'appins, Dark Cat told me it was 'eart disease.

CLARENCE. What!!!

MURIEL (*crosses c., gets boots*). Yes. That's what made me talk so friendly to you. I don't chat like this to every one, mind, but I always tries to cheer up the 'earts. (*Puts boots under toilet table.*)

CLARENCE. I knew it! I always knew it! I said to Olive, there is more wrong with me than nerves. And I feel worse every moment.

MURIEL (*crossing c., puts stick in corner*). I don't wonder, in this place. There! Everythink's put away right enough. I can't find no trousers. S'pose you brought them?

CLARENCE (*with dignity*). Certainly.

MURIEL. Must have left them downstairs. They'll turn up. Oh! 'ere's a photygraph. (*Kneels by portmanteau.*)

CLARENCE. Put it on the mantelpiece, will you? It's my wife. Heart disease!

(MURIEL rises.)

MURIEL (c.). It's a byootiful face. That's the sort of face I'd have picked if I'd had my choice. But I was be'ind the door when looks was given out. 'Ad to put up with brains instead. She's a reel byooty. I sorrer comin' in with you. She looked a bit different from this, though.

CLARENCE. That photograph was taken before our marriage.

MURIEL. Ah! That explains it. She looks 'appier in the pickcher. In real life she's got a worried look, like a new-born baby as didn't want to come.

CLARENCE. She worries over me.

MURIEL. Reely now! But why d'ye let 'er? I shouldn't. You didn't oughter let her.

MAY (*off stage*). Muriel!

MURIEL. That's Fair Cat. (*Loudly*.) Yes, nurse.

MAY. Come and get Mr. Reed's dinner at once!

MURIEL. Yes, nurse.

CLARENCE. Put the photograph here by me, will you?

MURIEL (*gives him the photo*). Mr. Reed! Ain't your name Carmichael?

CLARENCE. No.

MURIEL. Not? Then you're not the one with heart disease!

CLARENCE. Oh! Aren't I?

MURIEL. Sorry. My mistake. Then wot is it you're in here for?

(*Enter MAY, very cross.*)

MAY. Come *along*, Muriel. What *are* you doing! Mr. Reed's dinner's been out there for more than half an hour. I nearly had to bring it in myself.

(*Exit MURIEL.*)

I'll put the table ready. (*She takes bell and book off table, and puts them on toilet table.*) So awkward, Mr. Reed, we're afraid some one has taken some of your clothes by mistake. You know, the ones you took off last night. The coat and waistcoat came up here,

I know, but not—the rest. You didn't bring another suit, did you?

CLARENCE. No. Miss Bruce said the smallest possible amount of clothes.

MAY. Quite right. Well, they're sure to turn up. And anyhow you won't want them for a month. Nice to think of, isn't it?

CLARENCE (*dolefully*). Delightful.

MAY. Come on, Muriel! I shall never get my own dinner!

(MURIEL *enters with tray, which she puts on table.*)

Ah, here it is! Doesn't it look good? So glad it had the covers on. Lucky, isn't it? Take them away, Muriel. (*Hands them to MURIEL. MURIEL goes to door.*) Now you can manage.

CLARENCE (*inspecting the plate*). Nurse!

MAY. Yes?

(MURIEL *sees the fire wants attention and kneels by it.*)

CLARENCE. Do you know what this is?

MAY. No, I don't think I looked.

CLARENCE (*vibrating with indignation*). It's boiled mutton!

(MURIEL *looks at him.*)

MAY. Oh, is it?

CLARENCE. I never eat boiled mutton. Even to look at it makes me ill.

MAY. What a pity!

CLARENCE. And it's half cold, even then!

MAY. I was afraid it might be a little chilly.

CLARENCE. I can't touch it. I don't want it even near me. Please take it away.

(MURIEL *looks on aghast.*)

MAY. But you really ought to eat *something*, you know. Just to keep your strength up.

CLARENCE. Of course. But I must have something else.

MAY. There isn't anything else. But there's the suet pudding. Eat that. It's so nourishing.

CLARENCE. I don't like suet pudding.

MAY (*icily*). You're rather hard to please, aren't you?

CLARENCE. I don't call it hard to please when I don't like lukewarm mutton and suet! I've had a miserable morning of noise and upset. I've got one of my bad headaches coming on, and now there's no dinner except mutton and suet! It's a shame, that's what it is! I've never been treated like this before! And all this trouble and expense——! (*Cries.*)

MAY. Well, I never!

CLARENCE. Please go and tell the Matron I want to speak to her at once.

MAY. I can assure you that——

CLARENCE. Please go and tell the Matron.

(MAY *exits, flouncing.*)

CLARENCE. Disgraceful!

MURIEL (*comes c.*). I shall have to set you down in my book.

CLARENCE. What!

MURIEL (*very indignant*). And I thought you was different! I thought you was reely bad. That's why I started cheerin' you up. Now I see you must be one of them rest curers.

CLARENCE. No, indeed, I——

MURIEL. I s'picioned it when I saw the mut. Hot mut the fust day, sez I. No slops? sez I. 'E can't surely be a 'umbug. But when you starts a-hollerin', I knew all right. You can always tell if they hollers.

CLARENCE. I was perfectly justified in objecting to that horrible dinner.

MURIEL. I oughtn't to 'ave spoke. It ain't part of my dooty to cheer the patients up, even if they 'ave got Fair Cat to look after them. But I do feel sorry sometimes for the reel ones. They *can't* get out, sez I. But the ones that comes in 'ere ter please themselves! No! (*Goes to door.*)

CLARENCE. Muriel! (*She stops.*) Come here! (*She returns C.*) It seems queer that I should want to explain myself to *you*. But I do, somehow.

MURIEL. I'm a 'uman being, I 'ope.

CLARENCE. Yes. Well—you see, it's like this. I do *vers libre*—that's poetry. I'm making a great book. And, of course, if I die, who's going to write it?

MURIEL. And if you don't die, who's going to read it?

CLARENCE. I never thought of that. Perhaps that's the answer I've been looking for? Perhaps my work isn't as important as I thought. Perhaps *yours* on Nursing Homes is really more valuable.

MURIEL. Oh, I wouldn't like to say *that*. (*Crossing behind bed, gets tray.*)

CLARENCE. Still, even if I'm no use, I think I'd like to live a few more years, and I shan't unless I get out of this place. When the Matron comes I shall tell her I am going away to-day.

MURIEL (*sits chair*). Lor' love a duck, sir! the *Matron* won't come. Nurse knows better than to go to her with any nonsense of that sort. She'll just 'ang about on the stairs for a few minutes, and then she'll come in and say the *Matron's* gone out.

CLARENCE. Then I must give in my notice by letter.

MURIEL. You won't be allowed to leave like that, sir, not in such a 'urry.

CLARENCE. Why not? If I pay for the month.

MURIEL. Give the place a bad name, sir. Look as if you wasn't satisfied. And *Qui sec sac*, as they say in French.

CLARENCE. They can't *prevent* my going.

MURIEL. They can make it very unpleasant, give you my word. (*She crosses room.*)

CLARENCE. Oh, dear! And I hate scenes. Why did I come? Oh, I know, Olive can do it for me. Is there a telephone?

MURIEL. Yes, sir.

CLARENCE. You telephone and tell my wife to come

at once. I never know the number, but you'll find it. Hurry up!

MURIEL (*stops c.*). S'cuse me, but the telephone's in Matron's room, and I'm not allowed to go near it.

CLARENCE. Never mind. Do it for me. Just this once.

MURIEL. I'd like to do it, but I ain't rich enough to be a 'ero.

CLARENCE. I'll give you ten shillings—I'll——

MURIEL. 'Ush!

(*Enter MAY.*)

MAY (*loftily*). The Matron has gone out, so I was unable to report to her.

(MURIEL *looks at* CLARENCE.)

CLARENCE. Oh, it doesn't matter, I——

MAY. Do you desire any more dinner?

CLARENCE. No, thank you.

MAY. Then take away the tray, Muriel.

(MURIEL *takes away the tray*. MAY *crosses room, pulls down the blind.*)

MAY (*loftily*). I want you to sleep till four.

CLARENCE. Thank you.

MAY. Tea is at five.

CLARENCE. Thank you.

MAY. I trust you have everything you want.

CLARENCE. Yes, thank you.

MAY. That's good. (*At door.*) I shall expect you to be more rested after tea. (*Exits.*)

(*After a pause CLARENCE springs out of bed, and after one or two false alarms, gets his dressing-gown on. The door opens quietly. He gets behind the chair. MURIEL enters stealthily.*)

CLARENCE. Oh! It's you, Muriel.

MURIEL. 'Ow are you feelin'?

CLARENCE. Much worse.

MURIEL. Wot! Not that bad 'ead comin' on again?

CLARENCE. No, no. I shall never have that any more. I'm going to be a different man if I can only get out of this place.

MURIEL. Ah! I dessay. They all say that.

CLARENCE (R.C.). Muriel! Help me to escape!

MURIEL (L.C.). Wot? Going to 'op it?

CLARENCE. If you'll help me!

MURIEL. Wot can I do?

CLARENCE. Find my trousers. They're on the stairs or somewhere. Then do cave for me till I'm safely away. *Will* you?

MURIEL. I can't, Mr. Reed. I can't reely. If I was to do this, one of the cats would find me out and I'd be sent away.

CLARENCE. I'll give you a sovereign, Muriel.

MURIEL. It's temptin'. But when it's spent, where am I?

CLARENCE. Muriel, you shall be my secretary. To you I will dictate the *vers libre*! You shall use my typewriter!

MURIEL. Wot! For my book?

CLARENCE. Yes.

MURIEL. It's a go. I'll be a hero. It's worth it for that. Now this is the best time of the 'ole day for you to get out of the 'ouse. They're all asleep, all except the patients. You pack your things while I look for your pants. If you 'ear any one comin', slick back into bed.

CLARENCE. All right.

(MURIEL runs out.)

(*Business of trying to pack, and hearing footsteps. At last there ARE steps. He flies into bed. ALICE enters noisily.*)

ALICE. Hope I didn't disturb you. I left my book in here. (*Gets book from chest of drawers, is going, sees portmanteau.*) Why! Didn't Muriel finish unpacking for you?

CLARENCE. Yes—no—Yes.

ALICE. How stupid! I suppose I shall have to do it.

CLARENCE. Please don't trouble.

ALICE. Matron wouldn't like it if she saw the portmanteau still in here. Oh, they are in a mess, aren't they? I think I must leave it to Muriel. I'll send her in to you. (*Tumbles things out.*)

CLARENCE. Thanks so much.

ALICE. There's been such a fuss upstairs. My patient found a bit of glass in his jelly. As I said—what can you expect? Oh! You're going to sleep, I suppose.

CLARENCE. Yes, yes.

ALICE. I should. You look dreadfully bad. This never has been a lucky room. The nights I've sat up here!

(*Door opens. MURIEL's head is poked in.*)

MURIEL (*hoarsely*). No luck yet! (*Head vanishes.*)

ALICE. What is the meaning of that?

CLARENCE (*faintly*). I've no idea.

ALICE. Most eccentric. She must be told not to behave like that. It must have given you quite a start.

CLARENCE. Oh, no, I'm used to it.

ALICE. But I can see you're upset. You've turned such a queer colour. I think I'd better get Dr. Preston. He's in the house, I know.

CLARENCE. No, please don't trouble. I really feel perfectly well. The quiet and rest have done me all the good in the world—I'd much rather not have the doctor.

ALICE. Oh, all right, if you really feel better, I—

(*A door opens, a pair of trousers is thrown in. They hit ALICE.*)

ALICE (*catches them*). The girl must be mad. What in the world is that?

CLARENCE (*feebly*). I think it's only my trousers.

ALICE. But what a way to bring them in! Muriel!

(Goes just outside door. CLARENCE climbs out of bed and steals towards trousers.)

ALICE (*just outside door, shrilly.*) You're a very careless, ill-mannered girl, and I shall certainly speak to Matron about you. Throwing things in like that, and making all that noise when you know the patient's been ordered complete quiet! I shall go straight off to Matron as soon as she wakes up, see if I don't. Don't you let me hear any more of it!

(*Returning—CLARENCE feigns sleep.*)

That'll be all right, Mr. Reed! You'll hear no more of *her*, so go off to sleep in comfort.

CLARENCE. Thank you so much.

ALICE. Not at all.

(*Exits. CLARENCE springs up, rolls up his dressing-gown. Parrot whistles. He shakes his fist at it, MURIEL pokes her head in.*)

MURIEL. Now's yer chance! But sharp's the word!

CLARENCE. Then get out! (*Throws dressing-gown at her.*)

MURIEL *flies out, and he begins to dress as*  
CURTAIN *falls.*

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